

MARRIAGE AMONG /KUNG BUSHMEN

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ceremony is the avoidance of the parents, which is symbolic of the incest taboo. Any (preferably young) kinswoman who is tall enough and strong enough, whether she herself is married or not, and whether or not she has the joking relation with the bride, may carry the bride; and any may attend her. Only the mother absolutely must not do so. Likewise the groom's father must not attend him. Neither pair of parents go to sit by the wedding fire, for they must not sit near their son's wife or daughter's husband, nor speak to them. Guests of mature years might go and sit by the wedding fire only if they have the joking relationship with both the bride and the groom. Very young guests, such as we saw at /Nai's and /Gunda's fire, may go, whether they joke or not with the bride and groom, because the avoidances are not stringently observed with young children.

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Termination of marriage and remarriage

Widows and widowers are not avoided in any special way because of their widowhood.

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If her husband dies, a young widow usually returns to her own parents or lives with one of her own siblings, but, if her people are dead, or if it is her preference, she may stay on with her deceased husband's people. It is the duty of her Hu!r to hunt for her if she needs his support.

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Several possibilities are open to a young widower: rarely he might stay with his deceased wife's parents or siblings; more likely he would return to his own parents or siblings; and, when he marries again, he goes into matrilocal residence with the new bride. In any case, a man is responsible for his wife's parents and young siblings, and, if they depended on him for support, he would take them with him. They would be likely to prefer, however, to live with an adult son, daughter, or sibling of their own if they had any.

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Old widowers or widows whose own parents are dead usually live with either a son or daughter, or perhaps with their own sibling—as they wish.

The surviving spouse is free to marry again within the regulations of the extended incest taboo, which applies to all marriages.

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Parents would arrange the subsequent marriage of a widowed boy or girl. Adults may make their own arrangements directly. My impression was that persons might be considered fully adult somewhere in their middle or late twenties.

An adult man takes the initiative and asks the woman to marry him. Robert Dyson in the 1931 expedition learned that one way for a man to ask a woman to marry him is to present her with a bow and arrow. If she accepts it she indicates her willingness to consider his suit.

No restriction of time is put upon the remarriage of a widower, but a widow should not remarry until one rainy season has passed. She is then considered 'clean' and may marry again. Toma said, 'The rain washes (/num) the death away from the widow.' //Num is the gesture of wiping a dish with one finger and then licking the finger. /Ti/kay of Band 9 said that some men wait for a rainy season to pass, but that others would be pleased the husband was dead and, without waiting, say, 'This is my chance.' One interpreter understood that the widow had to take off her kaross and spend a night out, letting the rain fall on her, but Toma said this was not what

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587 was meant. That would be very uncomfortable, he said. It would make her shiver and
589 might make her sick. The rainy season's passing is what cleanses the woman. When
[783] she is about to go to her new husband she prepares herself by washing in the ordinary
way.

Unless a woman is quite old she does not remain long unmarried. One man said,
'Even if a widow is thick and tall, but is a good woman, some man will want her.'
Widows may marry as second wives of married men, or they may marry widowers,
divorced men, or bachelors. The two young widows and the two divorced women
who were unmarried in 1953, had remarried by 1955. Only the very old widows
remain unmarried.

There are so few unmarried women that widowers have difficulty in finding wives.
The young widowed musician, /Gao, was an example. After his first wife's death
he had married the daughter of Gao, the medicine man in Band 1, when she was
approximately ten or eleven years old, about the age of his own son, and was patiently
waiting for her to grow up. Only one of the old widowers had succeeded in finding a
wife by 1957.

736 The children of a widowed parent are kept by that parent. A widower may leave
768 his children with a woman relative, but they remain his. Orphaned children go to live
with relatives. There is a tendency to feel that the boys belong eventually to the
[611] father's side of the family, the girls to the mother's. This concept came to our atten-
tion several times, but we did not find it to be a rigid social rule. The relative who
[604] is expected to take the children if they are young is the MoSi. But the FaSi might be
nearer or more able for one reason or another to take them and might do so. FaBr
would be the relative most likely to take half-grown boys, but again MoBr might be
the one. Failing these, some other relative would take them. When it came to arrang-
[584] ing marriages for orphaned children, informants said that the father's elder brother
would have the most authority; a stepfather or stepmother has none.

[597] Adoption does not exist in /Kung society.

586 Divorce may terminate a marriage. The couple may divorce without formality,
by mutual consent or by one spouse simply leaving the other. The /Kung word for
ending a marriage in this way is /kao joo. I use the word 'divorce' for convenience,
although no legal action takes place. No religious dispensation is involved, no per-
mission or action on the part of the headman or group is required. If parents of a
very young couple withheld consent this might influence the couple, but the parents'
consent is not a requirement. No property entanglements present difficulties, for
there is no dowry or bride-price to be resolved. The only property a /Kung owns
personally consists of movables, and these are never owned in common by man and
[422] wife. Every artifact down to a single bead belongs to an individual, who takes his
property with him in case of divorce.

Divorce does not change people's status in the community in any way. They are
free to remarry without restrictions.

Divorce is never obligatory and the grounds are not formalized; the desire of
the couple concerned is the determining factor. A condition such as sterility, for
example, or a wrongdoing such as adultery, might or might not lead to divorce,
depending on how the couple felt about it. Mistreatment or failure to provide would
certainly be considered justification for divorce, should they ever occur, but justifica-

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581 becomes pregnant before marriage," at least so the chief of the
[842] horde assured me. Similarly, great importance is attached to off-
843 spring in marriage. There are no food prohibitions during preg-
845 nancy. When the confinement is near, all the women of the horde
gather. In case of difficulties, no help is given except a medicine.

611 The father's eldest brother is the family head. The boys be-
596 long to the father, the girls to the mother, and they also belong
to the families concerned. The kinship terms for the closest rela-
601 tives are: father, mba; father's brother and family head, mzu;
the latter's wife, mama (the children of father's brothers and
father's sisters are called siblings, and marriage between them is
forbidden); mother, aje; mother's brother, mko; the latter's wife,

582 tsoo. Unlike the !Kung, marriage
is forbidden even with the children
of the mother's brothers and
mother's sisters; within the
individual kin groups strict
595 exogamy prevails. Monogamy
is the rule, but, as among
the !Kung, a man may
take a second wife provided
he has the consent of the first.



Fig. 25. Girl's Necklace with
Magic Sticks and Perfume Box
(Nogau).

586 Marriage is indissoluble. The woman's family cares for the widow,
736 who, with her children, goes to her relatives. There is no obliga-
587 tion on the part of the brother-in-law to marry his widowed sister-
in-law or to support her.

582 ~~7~~Auin: Men marry when they are about 16 to 18 years old,
girls between 13 and 16 years of age. Both statements, of course,
are estimates. The suitor goes [72] to the girl's mother. If she
584 is no longer living, the nearest relatives (father, uncle, aunt) take
her place. The father is only the second to be asked. The suitor

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wishes uppermost in their minds. Orphans are eagerly adopted⁸⁴⁴ by their aunts or grandparents, and a newborn baby is welcomed as though it were the first baby the werf had ever seen. Sometimes, though, a baby is born that cannot be supported, and if this happens the baby is destroyed. If a woman bears a child that is crippled or badly deformed, she is expected to destroy it, and if the season is very hard and she already has a baby under a year old depending on her milk, she is forced to kill her newborn child. Bushman women can hardly bear this, but they do.

If a woman knows that she must kill her baby, she braces herself for this as best she can, and when the time comes to do it she must act immediately, must take advantage of the moment after birth before the infant has "come to life," that moment between the time the baby is born and the time her love for the baby wells up in her so that the act would be impossible forever after. She must think of the child she has already and act quickly, before she hears her infant's voice, before the baby moves or waves its feet; she must not look at it for long or hold it, but must have a shallow grave ready for it and must put it in at once and cover it and never think of it again. In times of extreme deprivation she can do this, or she can wait to watch both her children die. All this is very hard, and Bushmen, who have no mechanical form of contraception and know no way to cause miscarriage or abortion,⁸⁴² prefer to abstain from intercourse for long periods rather than to suffer such pain.⁸³³

We knew one woman who had been forced to destroy a baby to save an older child, and we knew one woman who had borne a crippled child and had been persuaded to destroy it by her mother, who had been present at the birth. Such things are very rare, though, and this is fortunate.

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LORNA MARSHALL

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Both the father and mother expect and receive respect and obedience⁵⁸³ from their children. Although the mother's influence is always felt, I believe that the father's authority is greater. It is not formalized or expressed in a harsh or domineering way. As long as the father lives, he is the head of the family, symbolically. Even when too old to hunt, if he is still a forceful^[882] person, he remains the one in authority, the leader of the sons-in-law and his daughters, of his sons and their wives. Gradually, however, when he becomes very old, the younger men make their own plans without necessarily consulting him.

!Kung families are responsible for dependents. Thus, old, dependent⁷³⁷ parents are unfailingly supported by their offspring and may choose with which one of their offspring they will live. Orphaned children are taken⁷³⁶ by their grandparents or by a sibling of their parents. It happens occasionally that a person has no living parent, offspring, or sibling. In that case, other relatives assume the responsibility.

THE NAME RELATIONSHIP • Although !Kung society has developed no⁵⁷¹ formal political structure under which the bands are united, and there are⁶⁰² no organizations outside the bands, these people have a means of extending⁵⁵³ the concept of kinship beyond close consanguineous relatives and affines⁶¹⁹ and of recognizing, in what we call the name relationship, the web of remote interrelationship that long intermarriage within the region has established.

Invariably the first son and the first daughter are named by their father for their paternal grandparents. Other children are usually named for their mother's parents, the siblings of their parents, and the spouses of those siblings, and may occasionally be named for other relatives. Thus, a few names are used over and over through the generations. We recorded only^[551] forty-six men's names and forty-one women's names in the region. The !Kung assume that persons who have the same name are related, though the exact nature of the relationship is forgotten. They believe, also, that people with the same name somehow have a common entity. They bestow^[601] upon each other kin terms that are appropriate to the name, according to a system. The !Kung have intermarried within the Nyae Nyae region to^[582] such an extent that everyone has a kin term he associates with each one of the names. This means that the people of the whole region are what we call name relatives, all applying kin terms to each other.

From the !Kung point of view the custom has two values. It regulates⁵⁵³ the incest taboo in its furthestmost extension, especially the joking relation-⁶⁰² ship that symbolizes the taboo. (For example, a man should not marry or⁵⁸⁵ make sexual jokes with a woman who has the same name as his mother.) The !Kung feel secure in righteousness when they know they are behaving

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when the wife is too old; she may then simply be sent back to her people. Generally, however, she stays with her husband, who then takes a second wife, younger and more active. The children of a divorced woman remain with their father, and are brought up by his new wife.¹ Among the Heikum separation of husband and wife may take place under various circumstances, as when the woman is childless, but this, says Fourie, is entirely a matter for adjustment between them. The wife on separation returns to her own group; the present made to her mother at marriage is not returned to the husband. The children are looked upon as belonging to the father, but if husband and wife should separate the girls, according to Fourie, are taken by the father and the sons by the mother.² This statement runs counter to those given above about what happens in the other North-Western tribes under similar circumstances, and is almost certainly inaccurate. [586] [595] [114]

Among the Namib Bushmen divorce may result only from barrenness or adultery, and is at the discretion of the husband. If he decides to separate from his wife, he brings her back to her parents. The mature children remain with him, while the youngsters who have to go with their mother also come to him when grown up. After divorce both parties are at liberty to marry again as soon as they wish.³

Marriage is, of course, also dissolved by the death of either husband or wife. As a rule the survivor may remarry. Among the Bushmen of Basutoland, however, a widow is said to have found it difficult to get a second husband, owing perhaps, writes Arbousset,⁴ to the popular belief that most of the deaths which occurred were due to witchcraft rather than disease. On the other hand, great attention was paid to her in the camp, where no piece of game was ever eaten without her having a share. [587] [589] [754] [761]

Further north this fear of marriage with a widow is not found. Among the Naron she may, if she likes, marry her late husband's brother, but need not necessarily do so; she is quite at liberty to marry another man. If she remarries, and if young enough most widows do so, her new husband is expected to look after the children; otherwise the duty falls upon their father's brother. An unmarried widow may stay near her late husband's people, or return to her own group, as she pleases.⁵ Widows among the Auen may also marry [184] [736] ● [587]

¹ Kaufmann, "Die Auen," 197.² Trenk, *op. cit.*, 100; Seydel, *op. cit.*, 305.³ D. F. Black, *Naron*, 34; *idem*, "Bushman Terms of Relationship," 67.⁴ "Customs of the Hei-//om," 60.⁵ *Op. cit.* (English trans.), 364.

- 587 "after a certain length of time", and, as among the Naron, there is no levirate. We are not told whose duty it is to look after the children of a widow, but in the case of a widower his children remain with him, and if he marries again are brought up by his new wife.¹

[736] The survivor of a marriage among the Namib Bushmen is not allowed to remarry until a full season has elapsed since the death of his or her partner. The belief is that if, for example, a woman marries a widower immediately after the death of his first wife, she also will soon die. A widow returns to her own people on the death of her husband, taking with her the unweaned children, who must, however, later return to their father's relatives. If she marries again the new husband must look after the children until they are old enough. There is no mention of the levirate, but the existence of the sororate is implied in Trenk's statement that a widower is expected to marry an eligible sister of his dead wife.² This is also noted of the Kung by Lebzelter.³

BIRTH AND INFANCY

- 581 A marriage is not regarded as fully consummated until the birth of a child. This is clearly indicated in the fact, already mentioned, that among both the Namib Bushmen and the Heikum barrenness is regarded as one of the main grounds for divorce. It is customary among the Naron and the Heikum for a woman to return to her mother's home for her first confinement, if she has already left with her husband to settle among his people; while among the Kung a newly-married couple remain with the wife's parents until after the birth of a child. It is probable therefore that among all the North-Western tribes a woman's first child is born at the home of her parents; about the other Bushman tribes there is no definite statement on this point.

- 843 Pregnant women carry on their normal daily occupations until the last moment, collecting veldkos and water, walking as far as the rest do, and so on, although they are apparently treated with some consideration in the way of food. Among the Kung a pregnant woman may not eat sour veldkos, nor anything sweet, nor any fat meat. No one may pass behind her back, nor may a pot be put on the fire before she has smeared herself with the soot clinging to it.⁴ There

Kaufmann, *op. cit.*, 117.
¹ *Op. cit.*, 14.

² *Op. cit.*, 168.
³ Lebzelter, "Bei den 'Kua-Buschleuten,'" 14.